

6

Refugees and Hope

Over that grim decade of the Depression, Lucy had anchored herself in the community of Erskineville; at the same time, she had taken major roles in the campaigns to defend teacher's salaries. In the struggle to defend women's jobs, however, Lucy had been disappointed by the men in her own union who had failed to stand behind her, so she had turned instead to an alliance with the women's movement. This allowed her to access a different group of people – many of whom had little understanding of the industrial conditions of either professional or working-class employees. Nevertheless, they had responded against the injustice of defining women by familial relations. Lucy, as a trade union leader, was able to bring access to a wider range of women activists than the middle-class feminist movements had been able to reach, and so, while their interests were not identical, Lucy was able to show the common ground. Lucy's work in these campaigns was well known to both groups – the feminists valued her role in bringing the strength of trade union activists, and the women in the trade union movement welcomed her facilitation of the support of feminist organisations.

Yet at the same time there was another arena in which Lucy was working of which little was known then nor has it been recorded later – and yet it reflected the fundamentals of all of the rest of her passionate commitments. At Erskineville, despite focusing on the children and their families, Lucy had still seen them in relation to the wider world. This sense of the world beyond the school walls was glimpsed in the children's library – deliberately located outside and unconnected with the school.

This was the vision that had motivated her throughout her career and, at the same time as she was finding her feet at Erskineville, she was reaching out to that wider world.

Lucy had never forgotten the Robinovitz family, who had offered her such kindness but had also shown her the cost of European racism and persecution. Her response to their story was inextricably linked with Lucy's commitment to progressive education, an interest that had been sharpened in her 1927 exchange experience with inner-city schools run by the London County Council. One of the programs the County Council had supported in its schools was the extensive use of theatre to foster children's psychological and social development and it drew on Rosemary Benjamin, who came to live in Sydney in 1936.

Her time working in London County Council schools had strengthened Lucy's skills in delivering creative progressive education in working-class schools. It was clear from Beverley Langley's memories of her early schooling at Erskineville that Lucy had fostered creative drama for all the children in her school.

Yet Lucy's time in these London schools had also made the experiences of the East End Jewish community very visible to her. Many among the East End community had faced persecution in Europe, just as the Robinovitz family had done, and the pressures on them were increasing as the Depression worsened.

Once she had returned to Sydney, Lucy retained her connections to exchange teachers, taking an active role in welcoming visiting teachers and maintaining contact with the schools and teachers who had already been part of the program. While the New South Wales teaching exchange program sent teachers mainly to the United Kingdom and Canada, it was the connections Lucy had made in her own exchange experiences in London, and the arrival of migrants from just those settings like Rosemary Benjamin, that maintained contacts that went far beyond Britain. This internationalism was strong among the small network of progressive educators with whom Lucy was mixing after her return, including the founder of Frensham, Winifred West, with her London and Indian contacts.

The Depression had challenged Australian teachers and their unions, as we have seen in the previous chapters. But there was far worse emerging for Jews in Europe, for whom the 1930s saw rising dangers. Australian

teachers with Jewish family backgrounds, like Sam Lewis, were becoming aware of these growing pressures, but otherwise it was mainly teachers like Lucy who had worked overseas, or those who kept abreast of the news, who were learning about the emergence of fascism across western Europe. Some, like the Newcastle teacher and writer Dora Birtles, travelled to Europe. Lucy had known Dora since university days when, as passionate writers of poetry, Dora and her lover Bert Birtles had caused an uproar in 1923, making the front page on the *Sun* and leading to the university expelling Bert altogether and forcing Dora out for two years with a suspension. This was just after Robert Irvine had been forced to resign as an outcome both of his left-wing politics and his long-running affair with his American assistant. Lucy had taken a major role in defending him.¹ Dora argued too that the expulsions she and Bert faced were political – imposed by a conservative university in the politically and sexually repressive climate of the early 1920s.² Dora returned – not to her BA but to Teachers' College – but she did not stay silent. Instead, she became the editor of the Teachers' College newsletter and, after qualifying as a teacher in the mid-1920s, went on to teach at Newcastle schools, at the same time as Lucy was teaching in the area, along the Hunter Valley at Cessnock and then, not far to the north, at Grafton.

Dora travelled through Europe in 1933, observing the rise of fascism there before settling in London where she campaigned for feminist causes and supported the Republican Government in Spain when the Spanish Civil War broke out. Dora sent back regular reports to the Sydney press, like that about Germany in September 1933, where Dora described how everyone she met was anxious and fearful about politics. She reported that the Nazi organisation was 'devastatingly thorough', with all the children in Boy Scout or Girl Guide movements wearing miniature uniforms and saluting 'in the approved style'. Very few people wanted to criticise the new Nazi government – and those who did were silenced by the anxiety of those around them. In the port city of Hamburg, the dock workers 'gave the Bolshevik greeting of the clenched fist', but elsewhere there were only 'Heil Hitler' salutes, while the streets bristled with 'the black swastika' and Nazi uniforms were everywhere.³

1 See Chapter 2, this volume.

2 Deirdre Moore, *Survivors of 'Beauty': Memoirs of Dora and Bert Birtles* (Sydney: Book Collectors Society of Australia, 1996).

3 Dora Birtles, 'A Newcastle Woman among the Nazis', *Newcastle Sun*, 21 September 1933, 4.

Among the people Dora met in Germany were Siegfried (known as Friedel) and Lotte Fink, both medical doctors – a psychoanalyst and a gynaecologist – practising in Frankfurt. Soon after Dora met them, they were both denied the right to practise because they were Jewish. The tempo of discrimination increased. Their older child, Thomas, won a competition for designing an aeroplane but was not allowed to take up his prize, a flight in a real plane, because he was Jewish. Then, in 1935, Thomas was prevented from attending his German school in Frankfurt, so the Finks took the advice of Thomas's headmaster and sent him to England as the foster child to a Quaker family, Nan and H.G. Newth, a biologist, in Birmingham.⁴ Conditions deteriorated still further and the Finks decided they must emigrate. They first had to obtain exit visas so they and their young daughter, Ruth, could get out of the country. Friedel had wanted to go to the United States where many of his psychoanalytic colleagues had settled, but he had been born in Posen, which had become Polish after World War I, and the US quota for Polish immigrants was already full. They decided to try to get help from their Australian friend Dora Birtles, who had returned to Australia in 1937. She was able to sponsor the Fink family's entry into Australia, and so Lucy met the family soon after, beginning a long friendship.

Another activist who had begun her working life as a teacher was Fanny Reading, who came to Sydney in 1922. Fanny had been born in 1884 in Russia, from where her family had been forced out, in conditions similar to those of the Robinovitzes. Reading's family migrated eventually to Melbourne, where Fanny became a language teacher. She decided to pursue medical studies and after graduating she moved to Sydney, to set up in private practice in Kings Cross with her brother in 1922. An advocate for women's rights within Judaism, Reading established the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) in 1929, by which time Lucy had already become a close friend. Lucy went on to host the first annual meeting of the Western Suburbs committee of the NCJW at her home in September 1942. When Dr Reading introduced Lucy at a number of meetings held by the National Council, she sketched out Lucy's work from 1935 to assist Jewish migrants escaping European persecution. This organisation was, in the later 1940s and '50s, associated with the Women's International Zionist Organisation in which Australian Jewish women like Ruby

4 Thomas came to Australia in the 1940s, studying Aeronautical Engineering at Sydney University, before travelling to the UK with his wife in 1947. He returned with his family in 1956 to take up a Chair of Mechanical Engineering at the University of NSW.

Rich participated. Rich usually took conservative positions in the many women's organisations she was involved in, yet she became very active in this body representing the goal of establishing a Jewish homeland.⁵ The threats to Jews in Europe were horrifyingly real, even in 1942 before the worst was known outside Germany. An affiliation to Zionism was at that time unquestioned by many, although not all, of those who were facing the terrors of fascist Europe.

By the time she helped found the Erksineville Children's Library in 1936, Lucy was already in touch with other Australians who had similar concerns and she had begun to assist Jews escaping European persecution. It was difficult to gain entry to Australia – many British Dominions did not welcome Jewish refugees and some, like New Zealand, had refused to allow almost all Jewish migration. Even if they were able to gain entry, many new arrivals, like the Fink family who arrived early in 1939, struggled to re-establish themselves in their chosen careers in a new country in which they often felt uneasy and challenged. Medical doctors, for example, had to undertake a complicated course of re-examination to become registered to practise. Friedel Fink did undertake this process but his wife Lotte, overtaken by childcare and homemaking duties, only ever practised informally after her migration, advising women about contraception and reproductive health.⁶ Just as disturbing was the anti-Semitism that was widespread in Australia at the time, making resettlement even harder. Lucy found a role in supporting both the employment of Jewish migrants as teachers and their attempts to enter training in order to qualify as teachers – or have their previous qualifications recognised. For some people, like the Goldschmidt family, Lucy was able to offer accommodation in her home and a continuing role as sponsor.⁷ As Fanny Reading was to introduce her in 1942:

Dr Reading ... spoke of the wonderful work Miss Woodcock had done for Refugees during the past seven years. She had herself assisted in bringing more than 160 people out and placed them in positions as teachers and also helped some of them to continue their studies at the University.⁸

5 *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 8 June 1951, 8.

6 Friedel Fink was naturalised in 1945 but was not able to register under the NSW *Medical Practitioners' Act 1938* until 1947. He served as an 'Alien Doctor' in NSW Mental Hospitals.

7 The account of assistance to Stephanie Goldschmidt and her family has been gathered from registers of naturalisation, indicating residence at the Beaumaris St, Enfield, home until the late 1950s and Stephanie's role hosting the 1942 NCJW meeting there, where Lucy was guest speaker.

8 *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 1 January 1942, 6.

In the uncertain conditions they faced in their new country, many Jewish migrants to Australia looked for organisations that reflected the ideas and interests in which they had been involved in Europe. Innovative education and child development were closely related fields in which many Jewish refugees were interested, including those like the Finks who had been part of an intellectual and highly educated class of professionals in Europe. (As in all warfare, working-class and impoverished Jews seldom had the means or opportunity to escape.) So for those who did come to Australia, the organisations that reflected innovative and cutting-edge progressive ideas were attractive. The New Education Fellowship (NEF) was important in this regard: it was familiar to the European emigrés because it had been most active in Europe in engaging with innovative theories of education, and it took a broad view of learning, fostering a recognition that education took place widely across society, not just in schools or universities. Just as important were its origins in Beatrice Ensor's commitment to Theosophy during the 1920s. Although Theosophy was politically ambivalent in aligning itself with both right- and left-wing movements in different places, it sustained an involvement with non-Western cultures, through 'Eastern' philosophies like Buddhism and Hinduism. This meant that the NEF offered a cultural receptiveness and cosmopolitanism that was very unlike the narrowing Christian Eurocentrism of the US progressive education bodies.

Yet the Depression had challenged many of the NEF ideas, reflecting an upheaval in the theories surrounding progressive education in Europe and the UK. These changes were to have a significant impact on educators like Lucy in Australia. The European shifts can be charted through a series of NEF conferences held from 1921 to 1936 in the UK, Switzerland, France and Denmark, which showed a number of emerging – and often contradictory – trends.⁹ The strongest source of ideas remained the old NEF focus on child-centred education in which attention was paid to the best methods of meeting the needs of each child, and an underlying interest in cultural diversity, arising from Theosophy.

9 Kevin J. Brehony, 'A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education, 1921–1938', *Paedagogica Historica* 40, nos 5 & 6 (2004): 733–55, doi.org/10.1080/0030923042000293742.

One shift, however, was that the NEF call for better training for teachers in order to equip them with better methods had heightened the involvement of university academics and added to calls for stronger research into education. In these European conferences over the 1930s, academics increased in number, although never becoming the majority of attendees.

Another major shift was a rising interest in the collective or social setting of children, rather than attention only to individual needs, demonstrated clearly in the 1932 conference at Nice in France.¹⁰ This shift was interpreted through the lens of the political alignments of the time. As a network, the NEF had been strained badly because its conferences were attended by small numbers of representatives from fascist states, although Ensor felt it was important that there should be no censorship even of difficult ideas. However, the anxieties expressed more often were about left-wing influences, with only thinly disguised anti-communism emanating from the Americans at what they termed a ‘retreat from freedom’.¹¹ It was, possibly, related concerns that led to a shift in the funding for the NEF conferences, which were so important to nurturing its stimulating impact on teachers. Much of this funding had been provided by US philanthropic organisations but, in the early 1930s, the Rockefeller Foundation withdrew its support. The shortfall was met, however, by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, which rose in significance as a funder not only in Europe but in Australia through the Australian Council for Educational Research and in the Pacific through the Institute of Pacific Relations.¹²

The final trend visible in the European conferences to 1936 may also have been related to the political climate or to the funding sources. The rising influence of psychology as a discipline was an important source of ideas about research in education to determine what the ‘real’ needs of children might be. The trends in the United States in the 1930s, however, were strongly towards the quantification involved in testing of the ‘intelligence

10 Brehony, ‘A New Education for a New Era’, 749–51.

11 Ray Hemmings, *Children’s Freedom* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973), who has associated it first with A.S. Neill then, in 1932, with Fred Clarke, who was the newly appointed Director of the Institute of Education in London.

12 Fiona Paisley, ‘The Spoils of Opportunity: Janet Mitchell and “Idealistic Realism” in the Interwar Asia-Pacific’, *History Australia* 13, no. 4 (2016): 575–91, doi.org/10.1080/14490854.2016.1249273; Julie McLeod, ‘Educating for “World-Mindedness”: Cosmopolitanism, Localism and Schooling the Adolescent Citizen in Interwar Australia’, *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 44, no. 4 (2012): 339–59; Julie McLeod and Katie Wright, ‘Education for Citizenship: Transnational Expertise, Curriculum Reform and Psychological Knowledge in 1930s Australia’, *History of Education Review* 42, no. 2 (2013): 170–84.

quotient' or IQ, of individual children, as a means of identifying not only needs and interests but the class and racial potential for 'educability'. This was an interest also strongly demonstrated in South Africa, and written on by E.G. Malherbe, who was in 1937 to organise the South African NEF Conference and then come to Australia, and whose work included producing standard IQ tests to compare 'the intelligence of the African native and the white people'.¹³ This class basis or racialisation of IQ testing was of great interest to social planners drawing on eugenics to address issues like the class-based analysis of 'juvenile delinquency' and the tensions of interracial conflict, both being social conflict issues evident in South Africa, the US and in the Pacific. Such interests in 'scientific' testing to identify class and racial 'educability' became evident also – although not dominant – in the European arena of the NEF conferences.¹⁴

Such issues were of importance in the areas where the NEF held greatest sway, which as well as Europe had continued to be the British Empire. This was of course a period when the League of Nations had made both development and colonial power into very hot topics. On the one hand, European states like the UK and France sought increasingly to justify their continued control, often disguised as League protectorates, over old colonies. On the other hand, and at the same time, the United States and many British Empire Dominions were debating strategies to control immigration and to plan 'racial hygiene' measures like IQ testing to justify eugenicist measures like sterilisation. So, in different ways, both were using the IQ testing as ways to justify continued control and discrimination. Yet the emerging discipline of psychology argued that it was justified in using the term 'child-centred' because IQ testing would free children from the tyranny of uniform examinations and allow curricula to be designed to meet the specific needs of each child (as determined by the IQ metrics).¹⁵

Lucy was torn by the debates around IQ testing. The children in the Opportunity Classes (OC) in which she had taught at Erskineville were selected through IQ testing, which was being used in experimental

13 E.G. Malherbe, ed., *Educational Adaptations in a Changing Society: Report of the South African Education Conference held in Capetown and Johannesburg in July, 1934, Under the Auspices of the New Education Fellowship* (Capetown-Johannesburg: New Education Fellowship, 1937); K.S. Cunningham, ed., *Education for Complete Living, the Challenge of Today: The Proceedings of the New Education Fellowship Conference Held in Australia, August 1 to September 20, 1937* (Melbourne, London, Edinburgh: Melbourne University Press with Oxford University Press, 1938), 298–310.

14 Brehony, 'A New Education for a New Era', 752.

15 McLeod, 'Educating for "World-Mindedness"', 339–59; McLeod and Wright, 'Education for Citizenship', 170–84.

situations in NSW and with a degree of caution.¹⁶ Lucy had argued that at Erskineville school, the OC children had thrived on a learning environment where they were encouraged to learn together, in cooperation, rather than to compete.¹⁷ There were clearly a number of different things at play here – and, as became clear in the South African and US situations, the testing could be used to very different effects. Moreover, Lucy continued to campaign bitterly against the tests for high schools imposed on all NSW children at the end of primary school, which sorted them into ‘academic’ and ‘technical’ high schools, denying most the opportunity ever to go onto further post-secondary study. ‘The NSW child’, she observed in 1935, ‘is being reared in a system of tests like cheese and butter.’¹⁸ In 1959, Lucy was to reconsider her views on IQ testing. When the tests began to be used to rank students for entry into high schools, Lucy became much more critical, arguing that the test could not predict the future performance of a child.¹⁹

In 1937, for the first time, the NEF conferences moved outside the geographic area of Europe. The conferences were held in British Commonwealth dominions or colonies – first in South Africa, where Ensor had worked, then to New Zealand and then Australia. The NSW Teachers Federation was active in organising the NEF Conference from the Australian side, and Lucy was on the organising committee. A cavalcade of British and European educators associated with the NEF, led by Ensor herself, spoke at the conferences. Only a few speakers in the lengthy program were from non-European countries, and most of those were from the US, Canada or the white population of South Africa. Three were not – Dr Hu Shih from the University of Peiping in China and the Institute of Pacific Relations; V.S. Srinivasa Sastri, Vice-Chancellor of Annamalai University in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu and Indian delegate to the League of Nations; and Yusuke Tsurumi, an author from Japan and also associated with the Institute of Pacific Relations. Dr Sastri may not in fact have arrived, and neither of the other two were reported widely in Australia nor were there any non-Europeans mentioned at all in the NSW Teachers Federation journal *Education*.²⁰

16 *Education*, 10 December 1936, 13–14.

17 See Chapter 4, this volume, for Lucy’s comments on Erskineville Public School Opportunity Classes.

18 *Newcastle Sun*, 16 December 1935, 7.

19 September–November 1959, cited in Lucy Godiva Woodcock ASIO file, Vol. 2, f 137, A6119, 2031, NAA.

20 *Education*, August 1937; P. E. Hornibrook *Education*, October 1937, 379–80; McLeod, ‘Educating for “World-Mindedness”’, 341.

The dominance of European and North American speakers in 1937 contrasted with the cultural interests of Theosophy, which had so influenced Ensor, and had by 1900 established strong bases in India and Ceylon. The 1937 dominance of the NEF by European and British/Anglo speakers also contrasts with the NEF conference held in Australia in 1946, after the globalising impact of World War II, and which will be discussed later in Chapter 9. The 1937 conference reflected the height of Eurocentrism in the NEF – by 1946, the organisation had shifted focus dramatically to orient itself to the decolonising world, taking on the South and South-East Asian networks of its parent Theosophy and expanding rapidly beyond it to include Latin America and Africa until in 1966 it finally renamed itself the World Education Fellowship.

Nevertheless, despite its shortcomings and tensions, there was an exciting array of people and ideas on show at the 1937 NEF conferences in Australia. The list of those who did speak reflected the cutting edge of thinking, research and practice in progressive education. Among them were two women of great significance to many in Australia. One was the NEF founder, Beatrice Ensor, whose continued interest in Theosophy had sustained a cultural openness in the NEF that allowed the organisation to extend its membership far beyond Ensor's own work, which was limited to Europe and South Africa. The second was Susan Isaacs, the leading Freudian in child development, who had greatly influenced not only educators but workers in creative fields like Rosemary Benjamin through her work in theatre. So even though the 1937 conference demonstrated the tensions between the conflicting trends in 'progressive' education outlined earlier, and which would all continue to be in conflict in the future, it was still true that overall the Australian conference was a powerful statement of the core focus of the NEF on 'child-centred' education. It was this progressive message that was reflected in the NSW Teachers Federation report.²¹

An Australian NEF had existed for some time in Melbourne, but Lucy took the lead in setting up a NSW branch as a direct result of the 1937 NEF Conference in Sydney. Lucy became its first president and its committee included many passionately involved people, reflecting the diversity of people interested in the broadest sense of learning and education, rather than its narrow expression in formal education. Despite its members' enthusiasm, the organisation was short of money, and for the first few

21 See *Education*, August 1937, 301–3 for conference report, 303–10 for summaries of a number of key papers.

years of its existence all the planning work of the NEF went on in Lucy's George Street flat.²² Clarice McNamara took on the role of honorary secretary and sustained her contribution over many years, a committed life that was reviewed by her daughter, Margaret Henry, in 2007.²³

A newcomer to Sydney who became involved was the Londoner Rosemary Benjamin, just then establishing The Theatre for Children in Reiby Place. When Benjamin first arrived late in 1936, she had not intended to settle in Sydney, but she found a great interest in her children's theatre and a congenial community in the émigré Jewish networks developing in Australia. Among the growing community of refugees with whom she was able to work in Sydney were the Viennese choreographer of modern expressionist dance Gertrud Bodenweiser as well as the musician and composer Kurt Kaiser (a German-born Jewish-Peruvian, known in Sydney as John Kay), both of whom worked collaboratively with Benjamin's children's theatre. This allowed her to offer children in Sydney an extraordinarily rich resource. Lucy would have known Benjamin in 1927 in London when she was working closely with the London Country Council on children's theatre projects. Benjamin had been heavily influenced in London by Susan Isaacs, who had been a leading speaker at the 1937 NEF Conference.

Lucy Woodcock, who by this time knew both the broader educational community and the network of Jewish émigrés very well, used her NSW NEF presidency to circulate an impassioned message of progressive education, an end to examinations and strong support for young working-class people. She drew on her long-established links with the writers and artists of bohemian Sydney when she spoke to the Australian Fellowship of Writers in May 1940 on 'Education and Creative Expression'.²⁴ For her, the NEF stood for:

educational improvement throughout the world, so that every individual shall be educated under conditions which allow of the full and harmonious development of his whole personality and lead to his realising and fulfilling his responsibilities to the community.²⁵

22 World Education Fellowship, NSW Section, *News Bulletin*, April 1968, 2.

23 Margaret Henry, 2007, 'Flowering, Fading and Facing the Facts: World Education Fellowship in Queensland – 1970 to 2005', *New Horizons*, 114: 2–6.

24 *SMH*, 11 May 1940, 9.

25 *Ibid.*, 20 July 1940, 10.

It was on this basis that she wrote as NEF President, for example, in 1940 to call for community support rather than criticism for the Boys' Town initiative at Engadine because it was aimed at:

directing the energies of underprivileged boys into socially useful channels by methods of gentleness, love, and interesting activity instead of by force and fear and hatred.²⁶

But the broader Australian reaction in 1937 to the international NEF conference was outrage in the popular press at what was perceived to be criticism of Australia by outsiders. P.E. Hornibrook, writing in the Teachers Federation journal *Education* in October 1937, satirised this popular press response as a belief that:

a nefarious band of ignorant foreigners, led by a boorish Scot, abusively and discourteously insulted the educational system of NSW, which, as all know, is perfect.²⁷

Hornibrook argued that there had been very little criticism from the speakers, whose exciting ideas were being ignored simply because they were from overseas. This was ingenuous – there was, in fact, significant criticism. Craig Campbell, for example, was one later analyst who pointed out that ‘many of the visiting educational experts had been shocked by the centralisation and bureaucratic control over public education which occurred in the Australian States’.²⁸ The NSW Teachers Federation, planning a series of major conferences in the following year, was determined not to appear as limited in its audience and as elitist as the NEF conference had done.²⁹

It was clear to everyone that war was looming and Lucy was drawn into debates about the conflict itself. In the meetings at which she spoke over these early war years, Lucy was on the same platform as activists well known to be in the CPA, bringing her increasingly under the notice of Australian security organisations like ASIO. In April 1938, she took part in a Peace conference titled ‘Victims of Aggression’ in which she defended teachers as the real educators for Peace, pointing out that teachers ‘daily’ had to correct the influence of children’s home environments, including their

26 Ibid.

27 *Education*, October 1937, 379–80, article by P.E. Hornibrook.

28 Craig Campbell, ‘*Education for Complete Living* (1938)’, *Dictionary of Educational History in Australia and New Zealand*, 18 March 2014, dehanz.net.au/entries/education-complete-living-1938/, accessed 17 November 2018.

29 See Chapter 7, this volume.

mothers' views, which were what shaped in children the 'spirit of national (i.e. racial) superiority and hate that brought men to the battlefields'.³⁰ Then in November 1939, at the Left Book Club, Lucy was one of the featured speakers in a public meeting called 'What are we fighting for?' where she appears to have spoken in a similar vein to her words about war and education on other occasions. In Newcastle in October 1938, for example, she had called for a complete revision of the school syllabus:

Civilisation had reached the crossroads. Man was facing two crises: the threat of war, which would destroy all they had built, and the dread of poverty, of which Newcastle had its share. Man had failed to adopt conditions which would ensure the abolition of poverty and to make the world secure from the ravages of war ...

Children were being crammed with prescribed doses of information. The democratic citizen in his childhood must be taught certain fundamental principles so that he could learn to know the truth and search for it. He must be taught to analyse and judge free from the prejudices and superstitions of the past. They should argue as free people not as shackled citizens.

Although a child was bound by environment, he should not be given second hand thought that would prevent free thinking after school life. He should be critical and tolerant ...³¹

A decade later, in 1950, at a NSW Peace Council conference on Education for Peace, Lucy argued that:

Education is the number one defence of civilization, yet it is the greatest casualty when war is declared. Education pays no dividends, except in happiness and security. If the money expended on war had been spent on education there might not have been a Second World War.³²

And in 1952, speaking before the Teachers Federation during a vote to adopt a Charter of Education based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights, she called for the 'defence of the child, the teacher and the school' against the 'inroads into educational budgets due to the expenditure on armaments and as a result of high prices and profits'.³³

30 *SMH*, 8 April 1938, 4.

31 *Education*, October 1938, 803, Newcastle Conference for a Progressive, Democratic Australia.

32 *Tribune* (Sydney), 14 June 1950.

33 *Biz* (Fairfield), 17 January 1952, 5.

Education was invariably her chosen field of activism. In the late 1930s, Lucy held at least some power to support refugees in her position as a headmistress and as a senior and active unionist. One long-term strategy was to educate young Australians about international history and politics. Lucy and Jess Rose (Lucy's ally in the Equal Pay campaign) moved at the national FSSTA Conference in Hobart in January 1936 that 'international history be a feature of all school syllabuses with the object of fostering world peace'.³⁴ Fanny Reading had pointed out two other – more immediate – ways that Lucy had been using her power. One was to bring people into the teaching profession. Hilde Byk was one of this first group, a young woman who arrived in Australia in January 1939 as a 25-year-old dressmaker, hoping to find a stable career for herself. By 1941, Lucy had assisted her to enter Sydney University's teaching course, which allowed Hilde to take up a position teaching at Winifred West's school, Frensham, at Bowral.

The other way that Lucy used her power was to help younger people through the secondary school system as students.

Ruth Fink was one of this second group.³⁵ Lucy was becoming aware that it was not only the adults with whom she was becoming friends who had been scarred by their persecution. The children also carried scars. The medical doctors, Lotte and Friedel Fink, for example, had tried to hide the worsening situation in Germany from their young daughter Ruth, but after she arrived in Sydney, at only seven years of age, Ruth wrote a story about a tyrant called 'Hitilar' who forced everyone to do his bidding on pain of death. Lotte and Friedel were shocked at how unsuccessful their attempts to shield their daughter had been, despite their care and concern to do so.

Ruth Fink spoke no English when she arrived in 1939.³⁶ Her parents found a flat in Kings Cross and enrolled Ruth in the nearby school, a very small private school named St John's, where, without English, she struggled to learn. The one place where she felt comfortable was in Rosemary Benjamin's Theatre for Children, where Ruth was able not only

34 *Mercury* (Hobart), 9 January 1936, 10.

35 We have some other names from this second group, including Hans and Stefanie Goldschmidt (although, see earlier, Lucy also assisted this family with formal sponsorship and accommodation) but many have either already passed away or are no longer able to be interviewed. As Ruth pointed out, Lucy was never one to promote her own activities and so it is difficult to trace much of what she did.

36 Born in 1931. Information drawn from Ruth Fink Latukefu, interview with April Garner, 29 April 2010, held in NLA; and Ruth Fink Latukefu, interview with Heather Goodall, 3 September 2015, Newport.

to act in plays but to write them. Ruth remembers it as ‘an outlet, not in the school itself, for things to be more creative’.³⁷ In 1941, the play she wrote and acted in was ‘Tramps become Gentlemen’. Without the Theatre for Children, Ruth reflected, ‘it would’ve been terrible’.³⁸

The importance of creative expression was exactly what Lucy was stressing at this time in her role as headmistress at Erskineville.³⁹ But it was not going to be enough to get Ruth into a high school. The teachers at St John’s were pointing to her poor examination and IQ test results – all based on English language and idioms like proverbs – to prove she had no future in secondary education.⁴⁰ Lucy had become close friends with Lotte Fink, who was an active member of the NEF, and Lucy became aware of Ruth’s unhappiness at school and her parents’ rising anxiety about her secondary schooling.

Ruth explains it in this way:

Lucy didn’t know me then, but I imagine my mother telling Lucy that she had been told I might not be capable of further education, and perhaps I should leave school at about 15. And it was Lucy who felt that this was quite wrong, she must have felt, ‘No, there’s something wrong here.’ I think she was already on the lookout for children who fell through that system, because there were others ... I was clearly one of those. And similarly there were Australian children who didn’t quite fit into the mould of the system, and so they got lost in it. She was there trying to rescue such children.⁴¹

So Lucy organised for Ruth to be admitted to classes in Erskineville, where direct attention could be focused on her language skills, in order allow her entry into an academic high school. Ruth began Year 6 at Erskineville at the beginning of 1943. She didn’t go into the OC and there was no special remedial teaching, so it was just the ordinary class, where Ruth remembers ‘trying to catch up what I’d missed at St. John’s’. The time was lonely – there was only one other ‘foreign’ student and Ruth has few memories of Lucy from this time – Miss Woodcock was only the distant school headmistress who happened to be a friend of her mother’s. But the

37 Ruth Fink Latukefu, interview, 29 April 2010, NLA interview with April Garner.

38 Ruth Fink Latukefu, interview, 3 September 2015.

39 See *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 3 September 1942, 10; Beverley Bates (née Langley), interview with Heather Goodall, Devleena Ghosh and Helen Randerson, 1 September 2016.

40 At that time, the NSW Education Department’s secondary schools were divided into ‘academic’ and ‘technical’ categories. If one failed to qualify for an ‘academic’ high school, there would be no access to university or any other further education.

41 Ruth Fink Latukefu, interview, 3 September 2015.

Erskineville teaching worked: Ruth was able to pass well enough for entry to the William Street High School, which, while not a highly ranked school, was at least an ‘academic’ school. At her Intermediate examination, Ruth’s pass was even stronger and she was able to transfer to Sydney Girls’ High, one of Sydney’s elite, academically selective high schools. Both high schools were a struggle for Ruth, but she was determined to master the syllabus. In the end, she passed her Leaving Certificate with very high grades, and headed off to university, against all the predictions from ‘IQ’ testing and her teachers at St John’s and William Street.

It was only when Ruth went to Sydney University, studying anthropology and psychology, that she became much closer to Lucy, who took a keen interest in her university courses and was eager to talk with her about her plans for research in north-western NSW. Lucy remained close friends with Ruth’s mother, Lotte, until Lotte’s death in 1960. Ruth’s own friendship with Lucy continued, finding common ground in Lucy’s interest in Aboriginal issues such as the assimilation policies of the time. Lucy remained in touch with Aboriginal friends from Erskineville, like the Watton family, and in 1960 invited Ruth to speak to the United Associations of Women about her north-western fieldwork.⁴² Later, Ruth met her future husband, Sione Latukefu, a Tongan Methodist minister and the first Tongan professional historian. In June 1966, just 18 months before her death, Lucy was among the many guests who celebrated Ruth and Sione’s wedding at the Wesley Chapel. Sione’s parents had made their first overseas visit to share the event. At the reception organised by Ruth’s brother Thomas, Lucy was among a diverse gathering of academics, former missionaries from Tonga and refugee families who had been close to Ruth’s parents, to hear young Tongans from Sydney singing beautiful Tongan hymns.

* * *

Although Lucy had seemed distant to a child, as Ruth was during the war, Lucy was in fact close friends with émigrés like the Finks as well as to the broader network of those opposing fascism. Her networks were connected – many of the émigrés were interested in the innovative, progressive education in which Lucy was so passionately involved. So there were a number of members of this community who joined the NEF. Ruth remembers her mother in particular to have been an active member

⁴² The Watton family to Lucy, Christmas card, 1955, in Kit Edwards’s collection; Lucy to Ruth, 26 August 1960, letter held by Ruth Fink Latukefu.

of the NEF, but she did not join the organisation to meet other émigrés, although a number, like Rose and Max Seidler, the parents of architect Harry Seidler, joined as well. Instead, as Ruth remembers, Lotte was interested in the NEF as a way to meet and interact with the progressive and active intellectual elites of her new country.

The NEF attracted those who believed in a progressive view of the future. With the continuing openness to diverse cultures, inherited from Ensor's Theosophy, the NEF uniquely brought together innovative educators, left-wing activists (including communists), anti-racism and anti-fascism activists like the Christian Socialists and, as well, some individuals among the émigré groups. Lucy herself acted as a meeting point for a number of different movements. Lucy was close, on the one hand, to the members of the NEF and its various activist members. On the other hand, she was linked to the many teachers who, like Dora Birtles, were active in the anti-fascist movements. Dora, as a novelist, poet and journalist, was close friends with Vance and Nettie Palmer, whose elder daughter, Aileen, was in the Ambulance Corps supporting the Republicans in Spain in 1936. Lucy was close also to the Palmer's younger daughter, Helen, who was to step in to take Lucy's place at an international Peace conference in China in 1952 to which Lucy was denied a passport because the federal government feared communist influence. Helen, in turn, was close not only to members of the émigré group, like Emil and Hannah Witton, but to Elsie Rivett, about whom she wrote a moving tribute sent to the Rivett family on Elsie's death in 1964.⁴³ This was a set of networks in which membership of the Communist Party was common but by no means universal. Most of the people in these extended networks would have seen themselves to be on the Left politically but many would not have been in the CPA. The NEF and its related activist network was one of the few meeting places for 'progressives' whether they were inside or outside 'the Party'.

During 1942, Lucy accepted a number of invitations from the NCJW – introduced by her friend Fanny Reading – to speak about her views on education. The accounts of her talks to the NCJW give important insights into her whole approach to education and to teaching at Erskineville,

43 Ron Witton, email pers. comm., 9 October 2015; Helen Palmer on Elsie Rivett, cited in Gwyn Long (Elsie's nephew) to Ida Brown for Judith Godden in 8 January 1987, in Papers of Elizabeth Long (Gwyn Long's mother) re Rivett family, Mitchell Library, SLNSW, Reference code: 4922528. See also Creative Leisure Movement papers, VII: History Files 1920–1991, MLMSS 7550/18/4, for letters from Gwyn Long to Judith Godden.

insights that are seldom available from her political speeches to and on behalf of the Teachers Federation, which were usually focused on single issues. These articles in the *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, although brief summaries, cover much wider ground, pointing to Lucy's goals of fostering independence of thought among young students so they could grow up to exercise their rights in active democratic debates and decisions.

She explained first that she had worked for the Jewish people:

in recognition of the kindness she had received as a young teacher at a country place where a Jewish family (Robinovitz) had been so kind to her. Now she felt that she wanted to repay that family by helping their unhappy fellow Jews.⁴⁴

In a later talk, Lucy described her approach to learning:

The old system of memorizing subjects was giving way to learning by practical experience. All facilities were now given children so that their creative abilities could be awakened. The child was learning how to govern himself, how to control meetings. Reason was given place over parrot fashion learning. Visits to museums, art galleries and factories gave children practical lifelong illustrations. It was important nowadays to know what the child is thinking and therefore group discussions were encouraged. This method was the only way to make the children stand on their own feet and not be imitators, not a machine-made individual but one who would build on its own foundation.⁴⁵

Over this time, in the years just before and then during the war, Lucy was able to draw the many threads of her life together: her long commitment to women's rights, her sustained internationalism and opposition to racism, her passion for teaching in child-centred learning environments, her unionism and her desire for a peaceful future. Each of these were to be sustained, although often woven together in very different ways, through the rest of Lucy's long and active life.

⁴⁴ *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 1 January 1942, 6. This was the friendship described so movingly by Queenie Symonds in later years and referred to in Chapter 2. Queenie Symonds, interviewed by Brenda Factor, NSW Bicentennial oral history collection [sound recording], 1987. Held in National Library of Australia (Session 1 of 2, 42:47–43:45), nla.gov.au/nla.obj-216364926/listen?searchTerm=Woodcock%20jewish%20refugees, accessed 15 October 2017.

⁴⁵ *Hebrew Standard of Australasia*, 3 September 1942, 10.



Figure 6.1: Photograph of Lotte Fink (on left) and Lucy, talking and smoking, in Lotte's back yard in Sydney in the 1930s.

Source: Courtesy Ruth Fink Latukefu, from her personal collection.

This text is taken from *Teacher for Justice: Lucy Woodcock's Transnational Life*, by Heather Goodall, Helen Randerson and Devleena Ghosh, published 2019 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.